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TAKE A SHINE/FANCY TO (SOMEONE/SOMETHING)

to like someone spontaneously

1. Tom liked Kate from the moment he met her. He *took a shine to her* instantly.
2. They decided to buy the house without much discussion because they *took a fancy to it*.

Compare to: *tickle (someone's) fancy*

TAKE/GIVE (SOMEONE) A RAIN CHECK

to accept a different time for an appointment from the original one; to request that an appointment be rescheduled

1. Thanks for asking me to have lunch with you today. Unfortunately, I'm busy. Can I *take a rain check*? I'm free for lunch almost any day next week.
2. Bonnie had a date with Tom for Saturday but her mother became ill and she told him she couldn't make it. She asked if he could *give her a rain check* for another time.

The expression originates from baseball and other outdoor sporting events, in which rain checks are given if the game is canceled because of rain. The *rain check* entitles the spectator to see another game on another day free of charge.

TAKE IT EASY

to relax

1. Don't get so upset over something that doesn't matter. *Take it easy*.
2. Roger had a heart attack last year. Now he *takes it easy* and doesn't work as hard as he used to.

TAKE OFF

to leave quickly (sentence 1) or to do well in sales (sentences 2 and 3)

1. The boys threw rocks at the old man's windows. When he came out of the house to chase them away, *they took off*.
2. The young man invented a gadget to use in the kitchen and now he is trying to sell it. It hasn't sold well so far but he's sure that eventually it will *take off*.

Synonym: *sell like hotcakes* (sentence 2)

TAKE POTLUCK

to accept whatever is available

1. I know it's short notice but you're welcome to join us for dinner if you don't mind *taking potluck*.
2. There isn't much choice left, but I'm not picky. I'm happy to *take potluck*.

The expression probably originates from the idea of a potluck dinner, where each guest brings one different food or dish to contribute to everyone's meal. Nobody knows in advance exactly what foods will be brought. Potluck dinners and potluck picnics are popular in the U.S. They are informal gatherings and easy to organize because no one person has to provide more than one dish.

TAKE (SOMEONE) TO THE CLEANERS

to steal or cheat someone out of all of his or her money

1. The unsuspecting woman agreed to invest all her money with an unethical investment banker. He *took her to the cleaners*, and she was left without a penny to her name.
2. I made the mistake of giving my dishonest nephew a blank check from my bank account. Instead of writing it for the amount we had agreed on, he wrote it for every cent I had. He *took me to the cleaners*.

Synonym: *clean (someone) out*

TAKE (SOMETHING) IN STRIDE

to accept and adjust to bad fortune or trouble

1. When I told them the bad news, I expected them to be upset, but they *took it in stride*. It didn't seem to bother them at all.
2. Rebecca isn't bothered by unexpected surprises. She *always takes things in stride*.

Synonym: *roll with the punches*

Similar to: *like water off a duck's back*

The expression *take something in stride* suggests that when one is confronted by something unexpected, it does not interrupt one's stride (i.e., the way one walks).

TAKE (SOMETHING) WITH A GRAIN OF SALT

to be skeptical or cautious about believing a story or an explanation

1. You can't believe everything Peggy says. She's inclined to exaggerate, so you have to *take what she says with a grain of salt*.
2. Nick is just making things sound worse than they really are. *Take it with a grain of salt*.

TAKE (SOMETHING) BY STORM

to overwhelm someone or something, often by becoming famous quickly (sentence 1), or by spreading very rapidly (sentence 2)

1. The Beatles were rock musicians who *took the world by storm* in the 1960s.
2. Fear of the disease spread across the country very quickly. Panic *took the nation by storm*.

TAKE THE BULL BY THE HORNS

to take action in a difficult or unpleasant situation

1. When it came time to paint the living room, nobody knew where to start. Ben *took the bull by the horns*, chose a brush, and started painting, and everybody followed his lead.
2. You know what you want to do for a living, but you need to start working toward your goal. Don't be afraid to *take the bull by the horns* and start applying for jobs.

Compare to: *bite the bullet; face the music; grin and bear it*

The expression *take the bull by the horns* does not suggest that the person is necessarily responsible for the difficult situation in the same way that to *face the music* does.

TAKE THE CAKE

to outdo; to exceed normal behavior; metaphorically, to win the prize

1. David has done foolish things in the past, but I never thought he would do anything this foolish. This really *takes the cake*.
2. They have always used poor judgment when it comes to social affairs, but this outdoes anything they have done in the past. This time, their behavior *takes the cake*.

The expression is often used to express one's shock at impolite or bad behavior. The shocking behavior is usually something that surpasses some previous bad behavior. It is usually used in the present simple tense and infrequently in the past tense.

TAKE THE WIND OUT OF (SOMEONE'S) SAILS

to deflate someone's ego (sentence 1) or to ruin or destroy someone's high expectations (sentence 2)

1. Mary was so sure that she was going to be offered that job. Wait until I tell her that the position has been given to Roger instead. That'll *take the wind out of her sails*.
2. I was hoping to be accepted by that university. When the rejection letter arrived, it really *took the wind out of my sails*.

The expression probably originates from the sport of racing sailboats. When one sailboat cuts in front of another, it literally *takes the wind out of* the rear boat's sails, causing it to lose its speed. The expression can be used to describe one's own disappointment (sentence 2) or it can be used to express a somewhat wicked delight that someone else has met with disappointment (sentence 1).

TALK A BLUE STREAK

to talk fast and at length

1. No one liked sitting at the lunch table with Phil because he had only one topic of conversation: his sports car. When it came to his car, Phil could *talk a blue streak*.

2. You can hardly get a word into a conversation with Wendy, the way she *talks a blue streak*.

Synonym: *talk (someone's) ear off; gift of gab*

TALK (SOMEONE'S) EAR OFF

to bore someone with one's unending talk

1. I try to keep my office door closed so that Jim won't come in. When he does, he *talks my ear off* and I can't get any work done.
2. Doug tried to signal me to interrupt his one-way conversation with Rita. It was obvious that she was *talking his ear off* and he was too polite to end the conversation.

Synonym: *bend (someone's) ear*

Compare to: *talk a blue streak*

Talk someone's ear off conveys a sense of boredom that may or may not be present in *talk a blue streak*.

TALK THROUGH (ONE'S) HAT

to speak without authority on some topic; to talk nonsense

1. Some people drink too much alcohol and then they begin to *talk through their hats*. They try to make you think that they know a lot about something when they really don't.
2. You should listen to Maria when she offers advice about buying real estate. She knows a lot about it. She's not just *talking through her hat*.

Compare to: *know beans about (something), not*

TALK TO (SOMEONE) LIKE A DUTCH UNCLE

person who talks to one like a close relative, giving advice that is sound, well-meant, and sometimes stern

1. The young man and woman were about to run away to get married, so the boy's brother took them aside and talked to them like a *Dutch uncle*. He told them that what they were doing was foolish.
2. The boy's father and mother could talk no sense into him, so they asked a teacher at the boy's school to *talk to him like a Dutch uncle*.

Similar to: *talk sense into (someone)*

TALK TURKEY

to talk seriously, usually about a business deal

1. I was ready to get serious about making an offer for the car. I was ready to *talk turkey*.
2. They were in agreement on their business deal; now all they had to do was work out the details. They sat down to *talk turkey*.

Compare to: *get down to business*

TALL ORDER

something difficult to accomplish

1. My boss wants me to finish all of this work by next Tuesday. It's a *tall order*—I'm going to have to work through the weekend.
2. My aunt is trying to cook dinner for our entire family without spending too much money. It's a *tall order*, but I think she can do it.

TAN (SOMEONE'S) HIDE/BRITCHES

to spank a child's bottom as punishment

1. Ricky didn't come home on time from his friend's house. When he got home, his mother *tanned his hide*.
2. That child is disrespectful and uncontrollable. What he really needs is for one of his parents to *tan his britches*.

The expression originates from the practice of tanning (preparing) animal hides (skins) for use as clothing or shoes by hitting them with a tanning instrument. *Hide* is also a slang word used to refer to a person's skin. The alternative *britches* (pants) refers to the fact that a person gets spanked on his bottom. The expression is usually used to describe how parents might punish their children.

THIRD-RATE

of poor quality

1. Let's get out of this *third-rate* hotel now. I know we can find a better one if we try.
2. The company fired Greg when the management decided that his work was *third-rate*.

Synonyms: *second-rate*; *fourth-rate*

Antonym: *first-rate*

The expression *third-rate* does not convey any ranked degree of inferiority when compared to second- or fourth-rate. All three expressions convey the same degree of inferiority.

THROUGH THICK AND THIN

in good times and bad times; steadfastly and loyally

1. My brother Tom has been there with me in good times and bad, through my joys and sorrows. He has always supported me *through thick and thin*.
2. No matter what happens to my husband, I'll stay with him *through thick and thin*. I'm sure he would do the same for me.

THROW DOWN THE GAUNTLET

to challenge someone to fight or argue

1. The candidate's opponent challenged her to debate the issues. The opponent had *thrown down the gauntlet* and she was ready to pick it up and accept the challenge.
2. If you don't want to start a fight with Carl, don't *throw down the gauntlet*.

A gauntlet is a glove from a suit of armor. The expression originates from a medieval custom of throwing down one's gauntlet as a way of challenging an enemy to a fight. One accepted the challenge by picking up the gauntlet.

THROW IN THE TOWEL

to stop trying; to quit

1. Roger had been trying hard to arrange a business deal between two groups. He was still unsuccessful after weeks of trying, so he decided to *throw in the towel* and spend his time on something else.
2. I'll never be able to pass my mathematics course, no matter how much time I spend studying. I'm going to *throw in the towel* and withdraw from the course.

The expression comes from the game of boxing. When a boxer has had enough and is ready to give up the fight, his or her manager throws the towel used to clean his or her face during the fight into the ring as a signal that the fight is over.

THROW THE BOOK AT (SOMEONE)

to give someone the harshest penalty or punishment allowed by law, or to impose any severe sentence or punishment

1. The judge decided to punish the thief to the full extent of the law. Instead of being lenient and giving him a light jail sentence, he *threw the book at him*.
2. The girl decided to buy the pack of gum instead of taking it without paying. She knew that if she got caught, they'd *throw the book at her*.

The *book* refers to a book of laws, and throwing it at someone means applying the maximum sentence a judge can legally impose upon a person convicted of a crime.

THROW/TOSS (ONE'S) HAT INTO THE RING

to announce one's candidacy for elected office

1. At first, Dan hadn't decided whether or not he wanted to run for governor, but now that he felt he had a good chance of winning, he was ready to *throw his hat into the ring*.
2. In order to get as much publicity for her campaign for mayor of the city as possible, Dr. Smith *tossed her hat into the ring* early.

Originates from 19th century boxing, during which men from the crowd would throw their hats into the boxing ring to indicate they wanted to challenge the latest winner.

TICKLE (SOMEONE'S) FANCY

to please or amuse someone in a light-hearted way

1. Fred decorated his garden with small animal statues because they *tickled his fancy*.
2. Before you decide that you don't want anything for your birthday, let's go to the jewelry store. You might see something there that *tickles your fancy*.

Compare to: *take a shine/fancy to (someone/ something)*; *catch (someone's) fancy*

TICKLED PINK

thoroughly pleased; very happy

1. I'm just *tickled pink* that you'll be able to join us for dinner next Saturday. I'm really looking forward to it.
2. My niece got her first job today. She's so pleased with herself. She's *tickled pink*.

TIED TO (ONE'S) MOTHER'S APRON STRINGS

emotionally or physically attached to one's mother beyond what is considered appropriate and normal

1. Philip is 58 and still lives at home with his parents. He doesn't take care of himself. He still lets his mother take care of him. He's *tied to his mother's apron strings*.
2. Rachel decided to break off her engagement to Ted. She realized he would always take his mother's side in a dispute, and would always be *tied to his mother's apron strings*.

Compare to: *under (someone's) thumb*

An apron is a piece of clothing worn over the front of the body to protect normal clothing from getting dirty, especially when cooking. The apron is tied on with strings. The expression *tied to (one's) mother's apron strings* usually describes an adult's continued dependence on his or her mother.

TIE THE KNOT

to get married

1. Roger and Sue decided to get married. They are going to *tie the knot* in church on Saturday.
2. You don't need to rush into marriage. Why don't you give yourselves more time to think it over before you *tie the knot*?

The expression suggests that when two people get married, they tie a knot that binds them together.

TIGHTEN (ONE'S) BELT

to spend less money than one did previously

1. Marian lost her job so now the family has to make it on Sam's paycheck. They're going to have to *tighten their belts* and spend less until she finds another job.
2. My car broke down and I had to buy another one. Now I have less money for some of the things I used to be able to afford, so I've had to *tighten my belt*.

The expression suggests that a person loses weight because he or she is unable to buy as much food as he or she once did. As a result, he or she must tighten his belt so that his or her pants don't fall down.

TILT AT WINDMILLS

to fight against impossible odds in an attempt to do good

1. Don't waste your time and energy trying to change a situation that cannot be changed. The bureaucracy is too big to fight. You'll just be *tilting at windmills*.

2. I've always been one to try to help the helpless, even when I know I have little chance of success fighting against the powerful. I guess I'll always *tilt at windmills*.

The expression originates from Miguel de Cervantes's novel *Don Quixote*, in which Quixote comes upon several windmills and, thinking that they are giants, tries to defeat them in battle by tilting at them (stabbing while running or riding past) with his lance (long spear).

TIME ON (ONE'S) HANDS, HAVE (SOME)

to have free time with nothing to do

1. Can I help you fix a few things around the house today? I have some *time on my hands* until after dinner.
2. The children will get into trouble if they have too much *time on their hands*. We need to find something to keep them busy.

Synonym: *time to kill, have (some)*

The expression suggests a degree of boredom. Whereas *have time on one's hands* means only that one has some free time, *have time to kill* includes the notion that one is waiting for a future event.

TIME TO KILL, HAVE (SOME)

to have a period of time to pass while waiting for some future event

1. I expected the plane to leave at 4:30 but it has been delayed. Now I have some *time to kill* while I wait for the plane.
2. Sarah arrived at the meeting early. She had *time to kill* so she read a magazine.

Synonym: *time on (one's) hands*

The expression suggests that one must get rid of (kill) the extra time.

TIP OF THE ICEBERG, JUST/ONLY THE

the smallest, evident part of something that is much greater but hidden from view; more to a situation than one can see at the moment

1. This latest scandal in the government is only *the tip of the iceberg*. I'm convinced that there is much more corruption than what has been uncovered so far.
2. The police arrested the man they thought was guilty of the robbery. While they had him in jail, they began to uncover information that linked him to many of the robberies that had taken place over the last few years. This latest robbery was *just the tip of the iceberg*.

The expression suggests that while only the top of an iceberg may be visible, the larger and more dangerous portion of it is hidden from view under the water.

TIT FOR TAT

an action in exchange for another equal action

1. Mark criticized Pam's clothes and in return she criticized his haircut. It was *tit for tat*.

2. I didn't wash the dishes for you yesterday, and today you didn't take out the trash for me. I guess it's *tit for tat*.

Synonym: *give (someone) a taste of his own medicine; fix (someone's) wagon*

The expression may describe insults (sentence 1) or some harmless error (sentence 2).

TO BEAT THE BAND

in an exaggerated manner; with a lot of effort or to the extreme

1. The child was upset that she couldn't have any more candy. Her yelling and fussing was loud enough to *beat the band*.
2. The girl wanted to speak English better than anyone else. She decided she would have to practice to *beat the band* if she wanted to succeed.

The expression is used to describe physical activity. It is always used in the infinitive form but functions as an adverb.

TOE THE LINE

to follow the rules; to do what is expected of one

1. Mr. Kelly has survived in politics because he *toes the line*. He follows the policies of the majority and doesn't try to stand out or be different.
2. The boss didn't want any trouble from his workers. He told them they had better *toe the line* or get out.

Compare to: *straight and narrow*

The expression originates from an early form of boxing, in which a line was drawn on the ground and opponents had to keep the toes of one foot on the line during their fight. Any opponent who removed his toes from the line was disqualified from the fight.

TONGUE-IN-CHEEK

joking or sarcastic

1. When Paul complimented his secretary's work, he was being facetious. He meant just the opposite, but was speaking *tongue-in-cheek*.
2. Sometimes, the teacher seems like she's being serious, but she's really joking. What she says is *tongue-in-cheek*.

The expression describes a style of speech.

TOO BIG FOR (ONE'S) BRITCHES

to be sassy or arrogant, or to act or speak disrespectfully or inappropriately for one's age or position

1. Patty's mother scolded her, "Listen to me, young lady. You may not speak so rudely to anyone. You're getting *too big for your britches*."
2. His father told the little boy that his behavior was not acceptable in their house. He told the boy he was *too big for his britches* and he would be punished if he continued to misbehave.

The expression is usually used by parents to reprimand (scold) their children.

TOO MANY IRONS IN THE FIRE

too many activities demanding one's time

1. I have too many obligations on my time right now. I have *too many irons in the fire*.
2. Beth is going to exhaust herself with all the activities she has taken on. She has *too many irons in the fire*.

Synonym: *have (one's) hands full*

TOP OF THE LINE, THE

the best quality

1. I'd love to have a computer system that is *top of the line*, but I can't afford it right now so I'll have to settle for one that has fewer features.
2. The customer wanted to see every television model that the store had for sale. He wanted to see the lowest-priced standard model, as well as the model that was *top of the line*.

Antonym: *bottom of the barrel*

Compare to: *first-rate*

The line refers to a group of similar products or a group of products all manufactured by the same company.

TO THE HILT

to be fully committed to something; to do something completely

1. When my daughter thinks she's getting sick, she plays the role to *the hilt* so that she doesn't have to go to school. Even though she might just have a cold, she complains that she aches from head to toe.
2. They tried not to get into debt too much. But they had to get a bank loan to buy their house, so now they're in to *the hilt*.

Compare to: *go to town; pull out all the stops; whole hog; whole nine yards*

TOUCH AND GO

precarious or uncertain

1. I wasn't sure I'd get to the airport on time. First the taxi got stuck in a traffic jam and I was sure I wouldn't make it. Then the driver found a short cut and I was sure I would make it. Then we seemed to get all the red lights and again I was sure I wouldn't make it. It was *touch and go* the whole way.
2. The doctor told the woman her husband was out of danger now but that it had been *touch and go* the night before. The doctor hadn't been sure whether the man would live or die.

TRACK RECORD

a history of performance

1. The manager decided not to hire Steve because he had been fired from several of his previous jobs. He didn't have a very good *track record*.

2. The stockbroker recommended against investing in the company because it was fairly new and didn't have much of a *track record*. She suggested I consider the company again in a few years.

The expression originates from horse racing, in which a horse's previous wins and losses are studied in an effort to determine how well the horse will perform in the future.

TRAIN OF THOUGHT

a course of reasoning; a succession of connected ideas

1. Dianne couldn't seem to concentrate on her work. Her mind was wandering and she kept losing her *train of thought*.
2. The professor began writing mathematical calculations across the blackboard faster than anyone could follow her. The students couldn't follow her *train of thought*.

The expression suggests a series of thoughts connected together in some logical progression (not randomly), in the same way that the cars of a train are linked together one after another.

TREAT (SOMEONE) TO (SOMETHING)

to buy something for another person

1. Sarah was charmed when Chuck offered to *treat her* to an ice cream cone. She had expected to pay for it herself.
2. "Thanks for helping me with that project," said Ellie to her friend. "Let me *treat you* to lunch sometime."

This expression refers to buying something small and enjoyable for another person, such as a meal or some kind of small outing.

TROUBLED WATERS

emotionally rough times or an unsettled situation

1. I've noticed that you and your parents have been fighting a lot these days. I would like to help calm the *troubled waters* if I can.
2. Mr. Williamson has been someone that we could depend on for strength and comfort ever since our father died. He has been a bridge over *troubled waters*.

The expression uses the metaphor of rough (troubled) water and is frequently accompanied by related vocabulary such as "to calm or to pour oil on," "bridge over," "deep in," "wading into," etc.

TRUE BLUE

loyal and steadfast

1. I trust Marie completely. No one is more loyal than she is. She's *true blue*.
2. Silvia would change her allegiance without a second thought. She doesn't know the meaning of *true blue*.

TURN A DEAF EAR

to ignore someone

1. The child had been whining and crying all day. Eventually his mother *turned a deaf ear* and ignored him.
2. Grandfather has always been quarrelsome and difficult. He loves to complain to anyone who will listen. You just have to *turn a deaf ear* if you want to live in the same house with him.

Compare to: *fall on deaf ears*

TURNING POINT

a critical point

1. Michael's heart attack was a real *turning point* in his life. He changed his reckless ways and began eating better, exercising more, and relaxing more.
2. Anna had to decide whether she would pursue her career in dance or go into business. She realized that she could not do both. This decision would be a major *turning point* in her life.

Similar to: *make or break*

The expression suggests a fork in the road where one must turn in one direction or the other, depending on which path one chooses.

TURN OVER A NEW LEAF

to change one's bad ways and begin to lead a better life

1. The man promised the judge that he was finished with his life of crime and that he was ready to *turn over a new leaf*.
2. I know Phyllis says she's going to *turn over a new leaf*, but she continues to follow the same ways and befriend the same people.

Compare to: *wipe the slate clean*

The expression originates from the idea of life as a book full of pages (leaves). When one *turns over a new leaf*, one leaves behind a spoiled page of his or her life and turns to a fresh, clean page to start anew.

TURN (SOMETHING) THUMBS DOWN/UP {GIVE (SOMETHING) THE THUMBS DOWN/UP}

to vote yes or no to something

1. I presented my idea to the boss but he didn't like it at all. He *turned it thumbs down*.
2. They really liked the advertising campaign and gave it their whole-hearted approval. They *gave it the thumbs up*.

Synonym: (*thumbs down*) *nix something*

The expression originates from the Roman custom of turning a thumb downward to mean "no" or that something was unacceptable and upward to mean "yes" or that something was acceptable. People still use the thumbs-up or -down gesture, particularly when speaking or hearing is difficult.

TURN THE OTHER CHEEK

not to retaliate; not to pay back bad behavior with more bad behavior

1. When someone does something bad to you, you should not retaliate. Instead you should *turn the other cheek*.
2. Sometimes when people take advantage of me, it's difficult for me not to want to get back at them in revenge. It's hard to *turn the other cheek*.

Antonym: *pay (someone) back*

The expression originates from the New Testament of the Bible, in which Jesus teaches how one should respond to ill treatment.

TURN THE TABLES {THE TABLES HAVE TURNED}

to reverse a situation

1. Jane was poor when she started her own business and she struggled for a long time, but she finally *turned the tables* and now she's wealthy.
2. They were beating the other team in the first half, but *the tables have turned*. Now they're struggling to keep up and win the game.

Turn the tables originates from tabletop board games such as backgammon. During the game, players would turn the table (game) so they played from their opponent's position.

TURN UP (ONE'S) NOSE AT (SOMETHING/SOMEONE)

to scorn, snub, or reject something

1. Mrs. Beasley wouldn't have anything to do with her new neighbors. She *turned up her nose at them* when they tried to make friendly conversation.
2. The child was so used to eating fresh vegetables that when I tried to feed him frozen vegetables, he *turned up his nose at them* and refused to eat.

Compare to: *give someone the cold shoulder*

Whereas *give someone the cold shoulder* is limited to people, *turn up one's nose* can be applied to people or things.

TURN UP THE HEAT

to apply or increase pressure to a person or situation

1. My parents have been nagging at me to get a job for several months, and now, they're *turning up the heat*. They've told me I'll have to move out if I don't get a job.
2. The lawyer *turned up the heat* and started to question the witness much more aggressively.

The expression suggests how pressure is created (or increased) when heat is applied to a pot of liquid on a stove.